

PROSPECT;

OR

VIEW OF THE MORAL WORLD.

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*Comments upon the Sacred Writings of the Jews and
Christians. Exodus Chapter 5th.*

THIS chapter is as strange a piece of revelation as ever was seen; the greater part of it is taken up with a trifling and contemptible altercation between Pharaoh and the Children of Israel about making brick. The latter makes most grievous complaints for want of straw, and what the straw had to do with the making of bricks it is hard to say. If they made use of it for fuel to burn the bricks, they might almost as well have been without it; if they incorporated it with the bricks, it was a strange method of doing the business, and quite different from that of modern times. But all such enquiries and objections aside, the question naturally arises in every enquiring mind, where is the religion or revelation of this part of the book? This long conversation between Pharaoh and those he held in bondage about the manner and the materials of their work is wholly uninteresting to us, and Moses and whoever wrote the book of Exodus could surely tell such a story as this without being inspired. It is ignorance or something worse that induces the christian world to call such stuff the word of God. But there is another reflection arises upon reading this chapter, of a more serious and impressive nature. The God of Moses, it seems, was not very popular either with the Egyptians or his chosen people. Pharaoh rejects the idea of any acquaintance with him—he does not know him at all, for he says in verse 2d, of this chapter, “who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to

let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." It is no wonder, however, that Pharaoh should hold in abhorrence the God of Moses; he had no doubt, Gods of his own which he held in higher estimation than he did this Hebrew divinity. Such has been the fact in regard to all nations; and, after manufacturing divinities to please themselves, they generally held in the most sovereign contempt the Gods of their neighbours. But it is something more extraordinary that Moses should fall out with the idols of his own choice. This will appear to be the fact by quoting the two last verses of this chapter. "And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil-entreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me? for since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people: neither hast thou delivered thy people at all." This is very pretty language indeed for man to make use of to his maker; it is upbraiding of him with a witness, and calling in question all the moral attributes of his character. It is telling him in plain terms, that he had treated them very ill, and that no firm reliance could be placed upon the properties of his existence. Another thought arises, however, which will in some measure solve the difficulty. We ought to remember that Moses and his God are not upon good terms; for in the very preceding chapter we have an account of a quarrel which they had at an Egyptian tavern, where God tried to kill Moses, but could not make it out. This was commented upon in our last number; we mention it now only to show that that circumstance might have been the cause of fixing in the breast of Moses a sentiment of rancorous revenge. But the whole business, the fracas at the tavern and the manner in which Moses addresses his God, instead of being divine revelation, has been made by very stupid and superstitious men, and deserves from the present generation neither credit nor attachment.

*Profession of faith of a Savoyard Curate, from
Rousseau, continued from our last.*

I perceive the Deity in all his works, I feel him within me, and behold him in every object around me: but, I no sooner endeavour to contemplate what he is in himself; I no sooner enquire where he is, and what is his substance, than he eludes the strongest efforts of my imagination; and my bewildered understanding is convinced of its own weakness.

For this reason I shall never take upon me to argue about the nature of God, farther than I am obliged to it by the relation he appears to stand in to myself. There is so great a temerity in such disquisitions, that a wise man will never enter on them without trembling, and being fully assured of his incapacity to proceed far on so sublime a subject: for it is less injurious to the Deity to entertain no idea of him at all, than to harbour those which are depreciating and unjust.

After having discovered those of his attributes, by which I am convinced of his existence, I return to myself, and consider the place I occupy in that order of things, which is directed by him, and subjected to my examination. Here I find my species stand incontestably in the first rank; as man, by virtue of his will and the instruments he is possessed of to put it in execution, has greater power over the bodies by which he is surrounded, than they, by mere physical impulse, have over him: by virtue of his intelligence also I find he is the only created being here below that can take a general survey of the whole system. Is there one among them, except man, who knows how to observe all others? to weigh, to calculate, to foresee their motion, their effects, and to join, if I may so express myself, the sentiments of a general existence to that of the individual?

For my own part, who have no system to maintain, I am only a simple, honest man, attached to no party, unambitious of being the founder of any sect, and con-

tented with the situation in which God hath placed me, I see nothing in the world, except the Deity, better than my own species; and were I left to choose my place in the order of created beings, I see none that I could prefer to that of man.

This reflection, however, is less vain than affecting; for my state is not the effect of choice, and could not be due to the merit of a being that did not before exist. Can I behold myself, nevertheless, thus distinguished, without thinking myself happy in occupying so honourable a post; or without blessing the hand that placed me here? From the first view I thus took of myself, my heart began to glow with a sense of gratitude towards the author of our being; and hence arose my first idea of the worship due to a beneficent Deity. I adore the supreme power, and melt into tenderness at his goodness. I have no need to be taught artificial forms of worship; the dictates of nature are sufficient. Is it not a natural consequence of self love, to honour those who protect us, and to love such as do us good?

But when I come afterwards to take a view of the particular rank and relation in which I stand, as an individual, among the fellow-creatures of my species; to consider the different ranks of society and the persons by whom they are filled, what a scene is presented to me? Where is that order and regularity before observed? The scenes of nature present to my view the most perfect harmony and proportion: those of mankind nothing but confusion and disorder. The physical elements of things act in concert with each other, the moral world alone is a chaos of discord. Mere animals are happy; but man is miserable! Where, supreme wisdom! are thy laws? Is it thus, O Providence! thou governest the world? What is become of thy power, thou supreme beneficence! when I see evil prevailing on the earth?

Would you believe, my good friend, that, from such gloomy reflections and apparent contradictions, I should form to myself more sublime ideas of the soul, than ever

resulted from my former researches? In meditating on the nature of man, I conceived that I discovered two distinct principles; the one raising him to the study of eternal truths, the love of justice and moral beauty, bearing him aloft to the regions of the intellectual world, the contemplation of which yields the truest delight to the philosopher; the other debasing him even below himself, subjecting him to the slavery of sense, the tyranny of the passions, and exciting these to counteract every noble and generous sentiment inspired by the former. When I perceive myself hurried away by two such contrary powers, I naturally concluded that man is not one simple and individual substance. I will, and I will not, I perceive myself at once free and a slave; I see what is good, I admire it, and yet I do the evil: I am active when I listen to my reason, and passive when hurried away by my passions; while my greatest uneasiness is, to find, when fallen under temptations, that I had the power of resisting them.

Attend, young man, with confidence, to what I say, you will find I shall never deceive you. If conscience be the offspring of our prejudices, I am doubtless in the wrong, and moral virtue is not to be demonstrated; but if self-love, which makes us prefer ourselves to every thing else, be natural to man, and if, nevertheless, an innate sense of justice be found in his heart; let those, who imagine him to be a simple uncompounded being, reconcile these contradictions, and I will give up my opinion, and acknowledge him to be one substance.

You will please to observe, that, by the word substance, I here mean, in general, a being, possessed of some primitive quality, abstracted from all particular or secondary modifications. Now, if all known primitive qualities may be united in one and the same being, we have no need to admit of more than one substance; but if some of these qualities are incompatible with, and necessarily exclusive of each other, we must admit of the existence of as many different substances as there are such incompatible qualities. You will do well to reflect on

this subject; for my part, notwithstanding what Mr. Locke hath said on this head, I need only to know that matter is extended and visible, to be assured that it cannot think.

Let us suppose that a man, born deaf, should deny the reality of sounds, because his ears were never sensible of them. To convince him of his error, I place a violin before his eyes; and, by playing another, concealed from him, give a vibration to the strings of the former. This motion, I tell him, is effected by sound. Not at all, says he, the cause of the vibration of the string, is in the string itself; it is a common quality in all bodies, so to vibrate. I reply, shew me then the same vibration in other bodies, or at least the cause of it in this string. The deaf man will again reply, in his turn, "I cannot; but wherefore must I, because I do not conceive how this string vibrates, attribute the cause to your pretended sounds, of which I cannot entertain the least idea? This would be to attempt an explanation of one obscurity by another still greater. Either make your sounds perceptible to me, or I shall continue to deny their existence."

The more I reflect on your capacity of thinking, and the nature of the human understanding, the greater is the resemblance I find between the arguments of our materialists and that of such a deaf man. They are, in effect, equally deaf to that internal voice, which, nevertheless call to them so loud and emphatically. A mere machine is evidently incapable of thinking, it has neither motion nor figure productive of reflection: whereas in man there exist something, perpetually prone to expand, and to burst the fetters by which it is confined. Space itself affords not bounds to the human mind: the whole universe is not extensive enough for him; his sentiments, his desires, his anxieties, and even his pride, take rise from a principle different from that body within which he perceives himself confined.

To be continued.

ORIGINAL POETRY.

FOR THE PROSPECT.

Reflections made near the close of April.

FIERCE raging winter, now is past,
 And May will soon arrive ;
 The season now advancing fast,
 Will Nature's charms revive.
 What brilliant thoughts inspire my soul,
 When I the prospect view ;
 In floods of bliss I seem to roll,
 While I the theme pursue.
 So late the dreary winter's storm,
 Did nature's face congeal ;
 Her splendid beauties all deform,
 And all her charms conceal.
 That verdure and those beauties bright,
 Which now begin to bloom,
 Were buried in cold winter's night,
 Their temporary tomb.
 But now the dreary scene is fled,
 And nature's face once more,
 With variegated beauties spread,
 As lively as before.
 Hail May, sweet season of delight :
 Thy presence all desire ;
 Thou theme on which the poets write,
 And all mankind admire.
 O, how enchanting is the sight,
 Of Nature dress'd in green ;
 With what keen rapture of delight,
 Do I behold the scene.
 The blossoms of the vernal flow'rs,
 And fruit-trees all in bloom,
 Which fill the groves and shady bow'rs.
 With fragrance and perfume.
 Bright Phœbus's enlivening beams,
 Still glimmering thro' the trees—

Beside me runs a gurgling stream,
 And zephyrs fan the breeze.
 The birds in sweet melodious voice,
 Their notes responsive sing;
 All kinds of animals rejoice,
 All nature hails the spring.
 The rural grove, the verdant plain,
 The slowly rising hill,
 The fields adorn'd with growing grain,
 With joy my bosom fill.
 O, Nature! thy reviving charms,
 Delight my feeling breast;
 The pleasing sight my bosom warms,
 And lulls my cares to rest.
 I often ramble thro' the vale,
 To take the cooling breeze;
 And aromatic sweets exhale,
 From nature's blooming trees.
 I view the lofty mountain's height,
 Or wander thro' the glade;
 And hear with most extreme delight,
 The murmuring cascade.
 The precipice and mountain steep,
 Terrific and sublime,
 Absorb me in reflection deep;
 And thus I pass my time:
 Secluded from a world of strife,
 In pure extatic bliss;
 O, could I always pass my life,
 In such a state as this.
 But I a different course must range,
 And seek my lonely cot;
 Time still rolls on, the seasons change,
 And all must be forgot.

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